Making Building Terrain

Most articles dealing with the creation of buildings suggest that you use a model from your collection and size the building appropriately. Unfortunately, for all of their good intentions, the authors fail to realize that statements such as these are useless for the majority of novice terrain makers. This article lays down some ground rules for creating buildings of any size and shape by providing basic dimensions to use to design your buildings around, and offers some suggestions on the materials to use for creating and finishing them.

Bear in mind that these are not hard and fast rules. Once you have the hang of them, have created and played with a set of buildings, you can decide for yourself what works and what does not. This article merely intends to lay down a set of rules to get you started.

City Fight Buildings

City Fight is a supplement for Warhammer 40K. It is an add-on set of rules specific to an urban setting. The biggest difference between City Fight and straight up 40K is the gaming board. City Fight boards feature lots of ruined and damaged buildings. For example, a 4′ x 6′ City Fight board can accommodate twenty four 8″ square buildings. Of course, it's not necessary to have that many buildings, but in game terms, the more terrain you have, the better the game.

The defining characteristic of City Fight buildings and terrain is the ability to move into and out of the buildings during the game. The buildings, therefore, need to be designed to accommodate the models. This means that there needs to be sufficient room within the building to fit an average size unit. The distance between the floors needs to fit an average sized model and allow the players to fit their hands in there as well, to see and move the models.

Basic Dimensions

The biggest problem faced by many an aspiring terrain maker is how big to make the buildings. The goal is to create a ruined building that can both look good, and be played in and around.

Width and Depth

A general rule of thumb for buildings used to play both in and around is 8″ is large, 5″ square is small and 10″ or larger is huge. You should feel free to combine widths and depths to create buildings of differing sizes and shapes, but even straightforward square buildings look really good.

An overall mix of building sizes is essential for creating a congested urban feel. The following chart suggests an optimal number of each building by playing surface size.

Table Size	5″	8″	10″	12″+
4′ x 4′	4-6	4-6	1-2	1
4′ x 6′	5-8	5-8	2	2
4′ x 8′	8-10	8-10	3	3
Larger	10+	10+	4+	4+

Height

As a basic rule, buildings should have between 2 ½″ to 3″ between floors. This allows you to place and move standard sized figures within buildings on the various floors, it allows you to move up and down floors in a single turn sequence, and still provides a reasonably pleasant scale ratio for appearance.

How high you make a building is dependant on the type of building you want. Again, a general rule to guide you is that low buildings should be between 3″ and 6″ and average height buildings between 6″ and 12″.

Anything over 12″ will appear very tall and will not always make for great game play. The reason for this is the moving of models up and down floors during the game.

Smaller buildings should not stand as tall as larger buildings. This is an esthetic rule. Tall, narrow buildings do exist, but in terms of a cityscape for gaming, they look ill-conceived and out of place.

Bases

Bases look best with squared corners. Even if your building only has one or two walls still standing, cut the base in a square or rectangle depending on the width and length. (The exception to this would be a star-shaped or round building.) This is also important for game play, as entering and exiting buildings is best measured from the base when the walls are missing.

Bases should only be made from MDF or press board. Neither material will warp significantly over time, or through the finishing process.

To size the base, take a measurement of the width and length and add 2″ to each. This will provide a raised platform with a 1″ border around the building. Leaving a 1″ border creates a sidewalk and street delineation that allows you to easily create streets and alleys by the placement of the building on the board.

If you do not want sidewalks, add ½″ to the width and length. This will provide you with enough of a base to attach the building. Buildings without a base border at all, tend to look smaller and unnaturally raised.

Office Building

Office Buildings are multi-storied buildings, usually taller than wide. These buildings tend to have lots of evenly spaced windows and standard sized door. This type of building looks good with two to three sides. The floors can be broken away, but will, for the most part, still be intact. It's generally a good idea to leave a section of flat roofing in place as well, to support a small to medium sized unit.

Windows

The windows should measure 1 ½″ high and 1″ across. Windows tend to play well when there is at least ½″ between them. This allows models inside the building to use the windows as firing points, while still successfully illustrating the value of the cover provided by the building.

Doors

Any doors should be large enough to give the impression that an average sized model could pass through it. Doors should be between 1″ and 1 ¼″ wide or 2″ to 2 ½″ wide for a wider door or double doors. Doors should measure 2″ to 2 ½″ high.

Floors

Exactly where to glue your floors in depends upon the material you're using to make the floors. However, the goal is to have between 2 ½″ to 3″ between floors. This allows you to move up and down the floors in easy to measure increments and provides enough space for your average height models and hands to negotiate around.

Warehouse

Warehouses are single or two-storied buildings, usually wider than tall. These buildings tend to have few windows and over-sized doors. This type of building can have all four sides standing, but it is a good idea to add extra access points such as holes in the walls if you're going to have four walls. Warehouses can provide cover for vehicles and walkers so it's a good idea to provide points where these models can enter and exit the building. Because they have a larger foot print than office buildings, it's not a bad idea to forgo a roof or to only run a thin rim of roof around the edges.

Windows

The windows should measure 1″ high and 2″ to 3″ across. Again, leave at least ½″ between them. This allows models inside the building to use the windows as firing points, while still successfully illustrating the value of the cover provided by the building.

Warehouses don't always have widows a the ground floor level, although it isn't a bad idea to put some there as units will have a difficult time shooting without them.

Doors

Warehouses should have at least one large freight door. This door should be big enough to give the impression that a vehicle could drive into it. Freight doors should be 4″ wide by 2 ½″ to 3″ high.

Floors

Warehouses do not usually contain floors. This is so that boxes and crates can be stacked high.

Other Types of Buildings

Most buildings fall into the office or warehouse category. However, storefronts and utility buildings can be easily created by combining the dimensions from both of the office and warehouse buildings. For example, a store or house may be a small single story building with fewer windows, a partial roof, and two walls.